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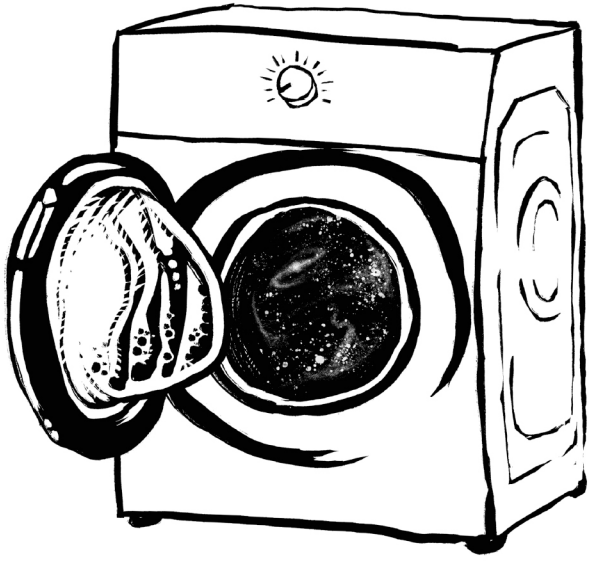


Note: The fragment designated ‘XL’ has been determined to be an English translation of Georg Trakl’s ‘Die Raben’ generated by running the German text through Google Translate. The poem is collected in *Gedichte* and *Die Dichtungen von Georg Trakl,* both available online via Project Gutenberg.

[ONE]

[I]

I'm writing you—not so much so I can forget, but so I shouldn't have to remember. If I'm to have learned anything from our time together—but how could I have, there's no sense to it, no way to make sense of it, I must make sense of it—it's that remembrance is a cruelty. We worry so about being forgotten, about forgetting, when it's remembrance—remembrance is the true warp and wreck of the world.

How do I begin? Well, how was the world before there was remembrance, before remembering? How was it even? How could it have been? To begin with, well, maybe you try to imagine it. Is imagining a kind of remembering—a remembering forward rather than back? Once I believed that the ravens of Odin were Thought and Forethought—perhaps it was a defense mechanism, my subconscious trying to tell me something, or untell, to protect me. Anyway, at the time I had been averse to all kinds of historiography—too bad; but maybe at least then it's not a thing I need worry about unlearning.

So that's it, then—I have to make it up as I go along. Make you up—as I go along.

But I'm reaching for you. Again. I shouldn't be, I know I shouldn't be; but I am. I must resist. This hunger for you, resist it! let it devour me! ME! inside out before I reach you! curling, grasping—NO. So that's it, then: I'm writing you—so I shouldn't have to remember.

[II]

The machine lies in ruins. I assume it's in ruins—what look like they're meant to be inside the curved, womb-like hollow of it hang uncurled from its lower lip—like the entrails of some enormous squid. If I were to examine all the pieces, take them in my hands, turn them over, imagine how they fit together—would I find the emptiness nestled in the tangle? What shape would it be? Was this how you were born, how I gave birth to you?

NO. Reaching again. Moving on.

[III]

There's a letter here with your name on it. I assume it's your name, who else's could it be. Who else would I have written, I don't write—I've never written—anybody else. Maybe I've never written you either—but I'm writing you now so who's to say I haven't written you before?

But is it for you or from you? I don't remember writing it, would I remember writing it? I don't remember having read it either—I assume that's how all this works; if it's from you, would it have been taken from me, the memory of this letter, along with everything else?

There's a letter here, your name's on it. I don't remember but I'm sure of it. It makes sense, how else do I make sense of it, there's no making sense of it.

I'm not reaching for you now, no. I'm not curling myself around you—not you I'm breathing in.

It's just a letter.

[IV]

Scent of green tea—in the air. Not the beverage, the fragrance.

Could be any number of places, hotels—were we in a lot of them? I've been in them I'm sure, how else would I know where to find this fragrance just hanging in the air. They use it in the toilets, in the bath. It lingers in the corridors. The lobbies.

~~We kep~~ I keep a small bottle of hand cream with that green tea fragrance here in the medicine cabinet. Yes, in the bath. A souvenir—I've certainly never used it, don't remember having ever used it, I'd never use it. Was it you then? Have you used it? Was it you brought this home for us, put it right here in this particular corner, here? You with your name on this letter?

I don't remember—mustn't remember. But. I can imagine, can't I? If imagining is the reverse of remembering, oh, then, there's nothing to contain it, is there? If something is ahead of you, then it isn't behind you!

I take the bottle—cradle it, not in my hands, in my mind—take out the stopper, squeeze a tiny, pea-sized bit of the cream into the middle of the open palm—I can imagine, that little droplet of white, squeeze it into your open hand, can't I? Imagine—I couldn't say I even remember what they look like, your hands, just imagine—that little bit of cream with that green tea fragrance wafting up to our noses from the exact center of your open hand, held out to me, reaching—but I'm being silly now, aren't I. You don't remember imagining, do you? Oh, but you do! You remember imagining all the time. In fact—maybe I've got this the wrong way round all along; maybe remembering is just a kind of imagining.

So now that's why I've written it all down. Why I'm writing you.

[V]

An experiment: I take the bottle out of the cupboard, cradle it in my hands. Hold it up to the light. Remove the stopper, squeeze a bit of cream into the hands—rub them together, unthinking, so that the cream disappears over the arched backs, the skin of the palms, the balls of the thumbs, between the fingers, the knuckles, round the wrists, the scent of it, the green tea fragrance wafting up, its supple breath wrapping round my head, gently closing my eyes.

They say the sense of smell is, what, a freeway? a short circuit? a detour to memory—but I don't remember anything, don't remember you—mustn't remember you—all I have is this feeling, welling up from somewhere beneath the exact geometric center of my chest, below the breast. I take a walk through the French gardens outside the hotel, fresh cut topiary bleeding their scent into the air. I breathe it all in. Breathe it *all* in. Swelling this feeling below the breast.

All there is is a feeling. I can curl myself around that, can't I? It isn' t you, I'm not reaching for you now—this is all I have.

Just a feeling.

[VI]

Stupid—reckless! Last night I came too close. And there, in the morning, tiny, like a germ, but vivid—there you were nestled inside me. Only a small memory, already dissolving with the sunlight, enough to dissipate with some meditation, a few distraction techniques; a few pills and now only the certainty of it, of having made that mistake—of having, briefly, *remembered*—remains. Not enough to require repairs to the machine, which, it occurs to me, I'm no longer certain I can get back to working condition without you...

I have to be more careful, clear the medicine cabinet. Really, the best thing to do is to forget the promise, let go the feeling.

But this is all I have left. All there is (just a feeling)—so I don't have to remember you, ever again.

[VII]

A lily drooping over the lip of a narrow glass bottle, its slight, periodic nod as it is touched by the light breeze from the oscillating fan a gentle reminder of sleep. I could do it, you know, just set everything aside for the night, lay my head, close my eyes. I could do it, you know I could. I don't have to write you.

But nothing else works. If I don't write you, I'll dream—I'll remember; writing you is the one thing that has allowed me to keep hold of this forgetting—keep the remembering at bay.

For a while, watching, I worried the lily might tip the bottle over. There's enough water in the bottle to make it an inconvenience—little more than that, you might not even have spared a glance over your work, our work; nevertheless, the fibers woven into my chest drew taut—it was a moment before I remembered to breathe again.

When I relaxed, my inertia spread over me like a thick, warm blanket—it was in this moment it seemed to me that it became possible: that I could do it, I knew I could do it. After all, I'd

done it before—this was how we lived, after all, how we had always lived. What does it matter now, just because I know?

But I *do* know—I know I must never let myself remember you again.

[VIII]

Let me tell you the truth about Orpheus and Eurydice. Don't do Eurydice the disservice of romanticizing Orpheus, repeating the old lie that he went out of love down into Hell to bring Eurydice back—to begin with, there is no Hell; the only Hadean Underworld is our minds. Orpheus, then, incapable or only unwilling to let go of Eurydice in his mind, thinking only of his own desires, incapable or only unwilling to relinquish that which he believed was his, descended into his own subconscious—that is, the past he held within him—in order to bring her, from his perspective, back into the light—*removing her from his memories*.

But you cannot take something out of your memories if you keep looking back on them; Orpheus's failure, then, is the failure to forget—his failure is *remembering*.

Let me tell you: This is the literal truth.

[IX]

Something is humming. It's not the machine, doesn't seem to be the machine, is it the machine? Glance over, there it is, right where I left it after I switched it off; still disemboweled, apparently inert on the floor—only I can't really be sure. I don't remember enough about the workings of the machine to know for sure whether or not it or any component of it is still ticking—just how much, it occurs to me to wonder only now, was the machine ever really mine? even if I were the only one who could flip the switch, who would subsequently turn it on—*use it!*—was it always only ever really *your* machine?—but in fact the humming doesn't seem to be coming from anywhere. Is there even a humming?

It worked, you know—you should be proud of what you've accomplished. Accomplished. Not exactly, it turns out, what you—what *we've* done. If memory serves as any indication, then the success is all yours. Relish it, I suppose.

If only I could let you know—you need to know what your machine has shown us. But how could I? To do so I'd have to remember you.

No. Too cruel. This—writing you—will have to do.

[X]

Did I ever tell you how there were no ravens where I lived growing up? How much I wanted one for a friend—I refused to say pet—how just the thought of seeing one, even in the distance, perhaps hearing just the echo of its voice, drove me to distraction? I ask all this rhetorically, of course—it would never do now to appeal to memory, no matter how tangential to the actual facts of you.

Growing up where I did, I knew only mayas. Didn't even know what species they were, that the name in fact encompassed a variety of small birds rather than a single, distinct species. Oh, I loved them well enough—once I found a maya chick on the path of my mother's garden; they must have fallen from the nest their own mother had built in the rafters of the house, too high up to investigate. My heart broke when I found they had died in the shoebox in which I'd tried desperately to nurse them back to health, feeding them bread crumbs without ever knowing what or even how they ate. Nevertheless, their ubiquity rendered them to my mind, however unfairly, unremarkable.

There seem to be ravens everywhere now; magpies, rooks, other corvids, mynahs; swans, cranes, great herons, all of whom may only have stopped by on their ways elsewhere along their great migrations, but who seem to have decided against nature to settle in, their songs, cries, and flutters accounted for all year round.

I'm listening to a raven now—their voice somehow both immediate and remote, ringing clear despite obviously coming from a great distance—coming nearer, then fading back away. I could have looked out the window to watch them fly by—the sky is overcast, but bright—instead I keep my eyes locked on these words. Having a bad day; putting words together is all that's keeping the memories away, putting drama to paper also somehow keeping the tears at bay.

The raven has gone, I don't hear them anymore; the mayas here never seem to stop singing.

[XI]

I know, I'm sorry—I haven't written you in days. I'm sorry—I don't have a good excuse either.

I spent the last few days on my back staring up at the ceiling. I know, I spend way too much time lying on my back. I know. But you'll be happy—happy?—to learn nothing untoward happened in the interim. Nothing catastrophic, anyway. Nothing worse than the usual. Nothing worse than the world.

But why is that? Why should that be the case? Today it occurred to me to wonder for the first time since I started writing you: Have I been wrong this whole time? Worse—have I only been lying to you? To myself? What exactly is that thing—those things that I assumed were bits of one thing—on the floor? What happens when you put all those things together into that one thing, turn it on? What was it meant to do, what did we build it for? Did we build it?

Did it even really work?

Way too much time lying, definitely.

And that's when it hit me—what's it matter, if I remember? I don't have to remember. What does remembering matter if this is how I feel? With or without it? With or without you? Writing you?

This feeling infusing every bit of me, right down to the bone, every cell, every molecule, enervating me even in—because of?—the absence of you. I suppose it's like having faith, isn't it—embracing a thing that isn't there with every fiber of your own thereness.

Maybe that's what God is, all God is—the one we forgot.

So what happens when we remember?

[XII]

There was joy. Brief, penetrating. Piercing me through, right here, in the middle of me. Let me hold it. Let it hold me. Please.

[XIII]

I can't go on, how could you ask me to. Did you ask me to? Of course not, you would never, how could you. Even when I can't remember you, I know you would never, I know you. I know you even if I can't remember you because I know what I wanted, who I wanted. I know what I had.

I had you. Had *you*. *Had* you. And you—you would never ask me to. But knowing what I wanted, who I wanted, what I had—how could I not go on anyway, even if you didn't ask?

Oh, couldn't you carry me instead—carry me inside you, this not remembering, *you* not remembering *me*, keep that not remembering inside you instead? I can't go on, don't ask me to.

But of course, you don't have to. You never have to, you never would—these are two sides of the same thing and I have to hold them, both, inside me.

That's okay—I've decided: there's plenty of room in here. The space you left for forgetting is vast, immeasurably vast. If I can't remember you, can't have, don't have you inside me,

then all I have is this feeling—and this feeling is space: a vast, immeasurably vast space that I have inside me. Instead of you.

This feeling is not you.

[XIV]

I did the laundry a while ago. I could have left the clothes sitting in the machine, but as soon as the machine was done I put a basket down on the floor beside it, lifted the lid, reached in and took out as much of the laundry as I could hold between my arms—again and again until the machine was empty, dropping each mess of fabric into the basket, sleeves, legs, garters, straps dangling over the basket's lip. When that was done, I took the basket out to the clothesline and methodically hung everything up to dry—you would have admired my efficiency. The sun had already been up for a while, shining full in a clear, clear sky; back inside the bare shadows were stained with miniature purple suns. I waited, in theory, for the laundry to dry—but the inertia of waiting laid me low again, put me out again, set me on my back again. Some of the clothes have fallen, I see them bundled like corpses on the ground, muddied by the rains that had started falling a few days ago—has it been that long? The sky is clear again, the sun back out, what clothes are still hanging now flap in the wind, waving to the world, signaling my dereliction. The lily has wilted—its petals dried out, insectile husks scattered on the floor between the machine's unchanged, unchanging—unchangeable?—en-

trails. How do I make the birds outside the window stop their interminable singing?

[XV]

I'm writing to tell you—I found something. In the library. A book. A journal of some kind. A traveler's diary. Wrapped in Japanese paper. Worn leather covers, a thrill on the ends of my fingers, warming them, as if they still contained life. Expensive—creamy, luxurious paper. An old, old smell.

The thrill turned to anxiety, all other forms of excitement—what if it were yours? What if I opened it and it was filled with words in your hand? What if it held your scent, reminded me of you? It did seem familiar somehow, though I couldn't place it. Obviously, I didn't try very hard. That would be stupid. Risky.

I sat down, had to sit down. The excitement was making me feel faint. I opened it anyway; when I did, it said—

I'm writing you—not so much so I can forget, but so I shouldn't have to remember.

—did I write that? You know me, I can never recognize my own handwriting. Can barely even read it. But though it was

only barely legible, I knew—I just knew—what it said. *I'm writing you.*

How long have I been writing you? How many books, journals, diaries have I filled with words like these—just writing you? Or do I only think I'd written them, written you, having only read about all this in some book?

I closed the book, put it away. Maybe I won't remember that I found it, where I've kept it.

[XVI]

Today, sleep.

[XVII]

A hard rain; violent, howling gusts throw the falling water periodically against the windows. Something—someone downstairs, I hear them. Rummaging around, but trying to be as quiet as they can.

Just like you used to do when you were over, waiting—but didn't, you said, want to be a nuisance; didn't want to rush me, even though you confessed you couldn't wait, either, not really. So you'd get restless, you said; you'd pace, sit back down, get back up...rummage.

Could it be? But it can't be, can it?

I remembered you a while back—a few days, weeks ago. I'm sure I did, but I don't remember you now. A small memory, barely a ghost, barely there; I did the exercises, just like we taught ourselves, our theories. That same morning, not a moment later, in fact, you were gone again; I wrote you, to be sure, for that extra bit of certainty. And the pieces of the machine, they're as apparently inert as ever on the floor; I never touched them.

Could it though, somehow, still be working? We never really defined the machine's operations, never clearly. We had no firm grasp over how it would work once it was turned on; could it, after all, even be turned off?

I close my eyes, count to ten. The rain slams against the windows, rattling them more and more violently; something falls, could be anything. There's that humming again, but this time it's only me; the muscles of my throat, tense. Count to a hundred. A thousand.

Suddenly the rain stops; the vibrating air, the silence itself, goes still—that unmistakable sense of finality.

[XVIII]

Those stirrings downstairs—whatever they were, whatever it was—they've awakened something inside me. The thing inside that's slept since you've been gone.

It's a moment before I can stifle the sound I hadn't realized I'd been making—a hoarse moan that seems to emanate from somewhere deep in my belly. I begin to remember things, but after I become aware of the sound I'd been making, after I'd cut it off, I steel myself, I'm ready, we've trained ourselves for this: in the memory, keep your focus on yourself. Let your own hands fill your inward, central vision, even as in the periphery of your awareness you situate yourself—I situate myself: You've come to visit, you're downstairs, you're waiting. Someone has already let you in or you let yourself in—did you ever have your own key, did I ever let you have one? But I'm not ready; I'm not ready for you. So I keep myself busy upstairs, keep busy with other things, continuing with my toilet, tidying the rooms upstairs, all while the pressure builds inside even as I keep my eyes on my hands, my hands. My hands. I can't hold the memory back for long—too late, there's no stopping my hands once they've started exploring.

They venture slowly downward and I'm bounding impatiently down the stairs on the balls of my feet to meet you waiting in the den.

Keep your focus on yourself—I close my eyes as I shut the door and lean back against it, letting my head loll back against the hard wood. It's hard to breathe. Even with my eyes closed I know you're reaching for me.

I won't remember you, I can't—but I can imagine some approximation of you based on the memory of how you made me feel. (Keep away from specifics, you can do this, surely idle fantasy can't hurt, can it, it's not remembering.) I remember your stamina—a safely abstract concept, I remember how you'd wear me down, bringing me to the brink, pulling back just in time to keep me on the cusp of satisfaction, not so dissatisfied that I'd be frustrated, but kept instead wanting more so you could come back again tomorrow, two, three days from now, next week, holding my Catholic guilt at bay.

But there's no point stretching this out, is there; no point holding back—after all, none of this is really happening, none of this really happened, this isn't remembering. Eventually we'd reach the inevitable point when we'd lose control and I'd collapse, shivering—on top of you, beneath you, in your hands, with your head between my legs.

I remember that, too. I remember that, too.

In a panic, I check myself—as the warmth dissipates, it leaves, in place of remembering, the same absence as before.

Relief, tinged with guilt.

[XIX]

Did we think it happened to everyone, really? Or were we, somehow, special? For once I regret having burned our notes—but of course that couldn't be helped.

So I devised an experiment. First, I had to put the machine back together—easier than I'd feared; but too easy, maybe? Have I remembered too much, have I been remembering too much, all this time? Never mind; somehow the experiment I'd devised seemed too important to be looking over my shoulder just then. I felt revived, somehow, didn't want to squander that energy, that sudden determination to do work.

It had been a while, obviously, but I feel certain I hadn't always been that way; instead of staying awake, keeping you up with theories and extrapolations, I feel certain I would have turned you out—chased you away and gone to sleep alone with my guilt. Maybe it's because you aren't here, I'm already alone. Maybe it's because I'm not the same as I was, not who I thought I was, not remembering myself right.

Never mind—I put the machine back together; then I got in the car and drove. Actually, that was as far as I'd gotten in terms of 'devising' the experiment—I had no idea what I would do next. I had some vague notion of picking up a child from the street, using the machine on them; it was late—I have no idea what day it was (I have no idea what day it is now), but the streets always had children, even at that hour.

The streets were deserted—some recently concluded 'clearing operation' again, probably. Soon they'd all be back on the streets anyway, so it was particularly irritating to me that there wasn't anyone just then. There weren't even any other cars on the street; perversely, the stoplights continued to operate as though there were, adding to my irritation. I briefly contemplated running a red, perhaps draw a traffic enforcer out of hiding—but I couldn't take a police officer home, would never, could never anyway overpower any other adult, certainly not one who was armed and was repeatedly given license even encouraged to use their power exactly as they saw fit.

I have no idea how long I'd been driving—long enough to begin having doubts about what I thought I was going to do (which was what, exactly, at that point?) but no longer than that—when I saw them. I drove around the block a few times to make sure they were alone. They just sat there, like any nine or ten year old child on the corner, prodding an empty plastic cup with a stick—never looked up once, did exactly the same thing each time I drove by. Then I drove to the nearest 24-hour drive-thru, bought the biggest, heartiest hamburger meal they had, and drove back. I stopped in front of the child and called them over.

As they approached the window, I found myself staring at familiar eyes, eyes I'd seen at my window before, eyes that tended to hover over an upturned palm as I sat waiting for the light to change. I studied their face—even up close I couldn't tell if they were male or female, but that was fine, I told myself that ambiguity would be useful to the experiment. In any case, I made sure to get to know that face better than I had before.

I opened my mouth to speak, realized I had no idea what to say. I opened and shut my mouth a few times, becoming progressively more acutely aware I was impersonating a fish out of water as my mouth dried up. Their expression didn't change, as though this had happened to them before, exactly as if this was the sort of thing that happened to them all the time. We stared into each other's eyes—despite my growing embarrassment, it was suddenly impossible to look away.

Mercifully, they broke eye contact, glanced over at the paper sack containing the hamburger and fries on the passenger seat beside me. I was suddenly intensely aware of the smell filling the car, my mouth suddenly moist enough to speak—Gutom ka? I asked hoarsely—almost, unintentionally, an accusation; dumped the sack at their feet and drove away.

I practically stood on the accelerator, didn't stop once until I got back; how many reds did I run then?

[XX]

Suddenly there is a child. What am I supposed to do with that?

[XXI]

The child was in the kitchen. I have no sense of how she might have found her way there. Had I turned the machine on? No point speculating—if I had I wouldn't remember. That *is* how it works, isn't it?

I use 'she' in the generic sense, as it's used for babies, younger children—even seeing her there just then, stood still under the single light of the kitchen, open to my scrutiny I was none the wiser. She wasn't *so* young, but young, still very much a child; her features squat—round, like siopao. Such a loathsome description, so generic, stereotypical—but then she had the generic look of a stereotype, the tibo: the round face over an ambiguously stocky torso, the single earring, the bare ears framed by hair cropped short, flat and drooping over her broad forehead at the time but worn spikey most of her waking hours, as it had been when I last saw her on the streets. She spoke with the stereotypical feminine baritone or masculine alto—the voice of a child, boy or girl, trying to sound like a man—Salamat, she said. Sorry to bother you, I just wanted to say thank you.

I stared at her. I didn't know what to say. What I should have said. My nerves tingled, my entire body aflame at this imposition on my accustomed solitude, I wanted to scream—how the hell did you get inside the house?

I bit down on my tongue but in that light our eyes were exposed.

—Salamat, she said again, more uncertainly, breaking eye contact, addressing the floor at her feet, and backed away from the light; the rest of the house in darkness, she retreated, disappeared into it—Nagpapasalamat lang po, I heard one last time, barely a whisper, a mumbled complaint. I sat still, nerves still burning, muscles taut as I listened until the darkness swallowed even the shuffling of her feet.

The silence following her departure suddenly poured into my body, coursing through me like hot lead; suddenly I was swollen with fear. Eventually I was able to unclench from around the breath grown stale inside me.

[XXII]

No matter the weather it's always so cold now inside the house. Parting the curtains to let the sun in only leaves me feeling exposed, naked. So I keep them drawn all the time, a shroud draped over the entire house.

I'm not bothered by the metaphor; I chose it, after all. But I also don't mean to imply there's no life left here—this is still a house, for me, not a tomb, not an early grave. I stay or go as I choose.

Still, the shadows are getting to me, a little bit, I suppose, though I can't be bothered to turn the lights on, not in the hall, not in the unused rooms of which there have always been far too many. A light in the kitchen when I get a glass of water; a lamp by the bed to read what I've written. The rest of the house I can navigate with my eyes closed. I don't even mind using the toilet in the dark.

The shadows, though—they come with a chill. Stepping into them, I imagine crossing a border into some foreign land, some other country, distantly familiar places where I've

walked down streets that remain substantial in the sunlight, don't waver under the heat of the sun. Where I never walked alone.

I don't believe in ghosts, but shadows can be haunted in other ways.

All the more reason not to turn the lights on.

[XXIII]

Before the chill, the perpetually drawn curtains, I disliked walking through the house at any hour during the day. The heat, the unsettled dust swirling slowly in the sunlight made me feel I was walking through some warm, viscous material in an aquarium whose tranquility had recently been disturbed. It filled me with an unnerving mixture equal parts lethargy and anxiety—a torpid nervous wreck. Except when it rained—you couldn't see the suggestive Brownian motion in the flat grey of a rainy day; in the rain, the inside of the house came closer to resembling itself as it was in the middle of the night.

There was never dust on the furniture; it was all constantly being stirred up and cast adrift into the air, where it hung whether there was sunlight to see it by or not. It had always been that way.

These days—even with the chill, the curtains—I only walk around at night anyway. I've always preferred solitude, but it can be unnerving during the day, in the sunlight—especially now, when I can only write you. At night it's as things should be—there's no additional dissonance in the silence and solitude to further clutter the mind.

The child is in the library. Shaking a feather duster over the shelves, probably. That's what she was doing when I entered. She immediately stopped, as though I'd caught her doing something she wasn't supposed to, which...was she? What is she here for? She put her hands together in front of her, the tip of the feather duster brushing the tips of her bare toes, tipped her head in a partial bow—Po, she said, a hint of doubt more than respect in her tone, then paused, neither of us knowing what to do with the unexpected encounter.

I suppose I must have backed out of the room and shut the door behind me, and here I am, writing you; I've been listening but haven't heard the door again since—she must still be in there, though everything now is perfectly still.

I'm writing you, wishing more than ever I could just remember you, have you here, with me, be done with it. I don't remember, but I'm sure you would have known what to do. I wish I could remember, but I'm sure of it: You would have known exactly what to do.

[XXIV]

We remember those we hate at their worst, those we love at their best—which is to say, we don't remember them at all, we remember *interpretations* of them, *impressions*, shaped by our own biases. This is how I knew—I remember this much, I can remember this now because this isn't you, this is just the how of it (or so I hope)—this is how I knew that the machine worked. How you'd stepped out of my memories and not, instead, in reality, somehow found your way back. to me. this house.

—this house. I can't vouch for the land it was built on—they say this land was a mass grave for the Japanese during the war, though whether it was supposed to be for their dead or ours, their kills, I never understood—but this house, by itself, completed on my tenth birthday after two, three years of construction, is too young to have ghosts of its own, not any that we hadn't ourselves brought here, hadn't created ourselves from the fabric of us, not from death, not from dying but from living here.

I do remember anyway as a child having fleeting impressions of this house perhaps—only perhaps—being haunted. I never had the luxury even as a child of that sort of childish certainty. A flicker out the corner of my eye, an ambiguous shadow crossing in front of me as I descend the main staircase—this house is haunted! another child would have insisted; I myself could only demur from such conclusions. The house's lack of history beyond my own experience of it prevented me from imagining such a thing.

But the house today seems to me more haunted than even in that remembered childhood. Certainly, a lot has happened since then. I have, after all, quite a few more skeletons than you. But the corners, the shadows—they seem wrong somehow.

Is the wrongness because this house isn't how I remember—or because it is?

—and the child?

[XXV]

When we were children. I haven't thought of childhood in a while, least of all mine. I don't dare look too hard, but I think I may have lost it as well—my childhood. How long had we known each other, you and I? I remember so little, hardly anything at all anymore. Is it because you were there as well?

[XXVI]

I wonder how much indeterminacy the mind can bear. Is there a point at which one simply collapses under the burden of indeterminacy? What would that look like? I'm almost certain it would be a relief. Or have I already crossed that threshold?

[XXVII]

Children on the streets, such small hands. What is it about small hands? Why am I so enamored by the phrase? Is it the phrase or the hands themselves that have such a hold on me? No one, not even the rain—but for children, I suppose. What did Cummings know of children?

Or maybe it is, after all, the rain I've been thinking of all along. The rain that used to release me from my room, letting me wander at leisure through the house even in the daytime (before the chill, the curtains). Rain begins to pour, pattering at first pleasantly, then battering the roof, the windshield; at first dampening then soaking the hair of the child standing on the other side of my window, pressing the hair down her forehead before running into her eyes, down her nose. She catches the rain in her tiny palm as she raises it up to my face. She doesn't even notice.

She's not the one I'm looking for. Is she still in the house? Was it a mistake to drive out here looking for her?

I move to roll down the window when the car behind me brays angrily, sending the child scurrying away. Such timidity, she must be new. How long will she last? As long as she has to, as long as we leave her no choice; eventually, I tell myself, she'll learn the defiance of the other children.

Imagine that defiance raising those small hands up against us, instead of palms held out, clenched into skinny fists.

[XXVIII]

Why do I choose to spend so many hours of the day sitting in traffic? I realize the privilege inherent in the very question—in having, ultimately, nowhere in particular you have to be. Of course, the question remains—Why do it at all if you have nowhere to go? You set out telling yourself you're looking for her, but of course there's no truth to it—and you're fully aware of it, no fooling yourself no matter what you say you believe as you head out; there's simply no sense to be made of looking for someone you know isn't there, isn't anywhere there. Looking for someone as if you didn't already know where you could find them. If you were really looking.

The question you ask yourself, then, I suppose, is—what are you doing out here?

But, really—what are you doing, anywhere?

And, anyway, if you could find her out there—what would you even do?

[XXIX]

Remind me—who is it I'm meant to be looking for again?

[XXX]

I don't write as much anymore but when I do it feels completely natural, a thing that I, for whatever reason, simply do. I can't be bothered going back to the beginning, reading everything over from the start—I can't, and shan't. I flip through some pages and there's something there at the very beginning or very nearly, about writing to forget? Well then, I suppose it worked? Whatever it is I started writing for—to forget?—I can honestly say...I have no idea.

I'm growing accustomed to the child; how long has she been here already, has she always been, has it been forever? She's grown familiar as well, even taken it upon herself to tidy up this very room, not even bothering to wait until I'm out before she busies herself with that pile on the floor.

Yes, there's that heap of something over there she's finally just now managed to bundle together, poor thing trying to hold it all together in her arms while these—wires? hoses? genitalia?—these weird ambiguous tentacular things wave around, flop about and over her head, loop back down to drag on the floor. Whoops that's going to leave a mark. I think she might

actually manage it this time, get all the pieces together and out through the door. I see her eyeing the window—tempting, she's much closer to it than the door, but no, just one more valiant try—

[XXXI]

What is all this? What mess is this? You've left everything lying around in the room so long, it's developed roots. The mess and the room have grown into each other, like the bougainvillea that has overgrown the terrace outside in the garden. It's a mess that has been left so long it's started to make a kind of sense, more sense than it would if it were cleaned up. Which just makes it harder to do so. To do so would be to change the room so fundamentally, it won't be your room anymore.

So there's only one way left to do it, really. It's what they make us wear uniforms for, isn't it, because that's what we do—we make everything up to this semblance of everything else; cleanliness as order as uniformity. It won't be your room anymore. But it will be clean.

[XXXII]

You've never asked me to wear a uniform. Point of pride, obviously, but to be perfectly honest, also a bit of an embarrassment. I have my own clothes, I have enough that I don't need to do laundry too often to be able to put a clean shirt on, but it's hard to calibrate what to wear, what not to wear—how to put something together that shows just enough of who I am, be a human being with a particular identity, project a decent amount of dignity, without...overstepping? Hard to tell if that even is a thing I should be worrying about with you.

You've never asked me to wear a uniform. But then you've never really asked me to do anything. Hard to tell why you have me around at all, really. So I just do what I think I should be doing, enough to make myself feel useful and not so completely out of place (even though, obviously, I am).

How did I even get here? I can barely remember a time before I was having to navigate the peculiar sort of mess this house is, the way it has corners full of shadows that never seem exactly like they're supposed to be, how there are always these bits and pieces of things scattered about, and I can't imagine

what in the world they're for, where in the world they've come from, how they somehow manage to be both completely mundane, commonplace, and yet also so odd that I can't help but wonder about them as I'm carefully removing the dust from them, or figuring out which way they were facing before I picked them up so you don't notice I moved them, or where to set them aside. All while being pretty much exactly how I imagine these big houses would be like on the inside without ever having been in one before.

Yes, to be perfectly honest, it's all very peculiar, isn't it, being here. But also, I suppose, it's better than having nowhere to go.

[XXXIII]

No matter how big the house is, it's really not that hard to keep clean. The biggest challenge was clearing the mess of your room. At first I didn't know whether you even wanted me to clean your room, but it seemed like something I should do, something you needed me to do, and when I started, gathering the weird, unwieldy but surprisingly light debris up off the floor and into my arms, then away to my room for temporary storage—work that turned out took no more than a day, even with the discomfort of your watchful but, because seemingly indifferent, easily forgotten gaze—you just let me. You watched the whole time, but without judgment—you just let me. After that, there was only the everpresent dust to deal with. I don't mind, dusting is light work, even if it never ends. I don't mind—it's something to do. Unlike most people I know, I've never really cared for TV shows or movies, never owned a computer or phone. That's another strange thing about this house: there's no TV, no computer, not even a radio. You don't even seem to have a phone—landline or cel. The house doesn't seem particularly old, nothing in it seems particularly antiquated, but the absence of these technologies makes it seem completely out of time. Sometimes, that and the weird

thing or things I took from your room together make me feel like I'm in another world. It makes me wonder what I'd do if I ever had to call someone in the other world outside the house. But I don't really know anyone out there anymore. That life is over. Anyway, mostly everything just seems ordinary.

Oh, except the notes. Somehow I find the notes even stranger than the thing I took from your room when I cleaned it.

When you leave your room, you goes around the house writing and then leaving notes everywhere. When I first found the notes I had no idea what to do with them, but I've started gathering up whatever I find—you never seem to mind, don't even seem to realize what your doing, seem to forget about whatever you've written as soon as you've finished writing it. Once I saw you find a note I'd seen you write the day before. You looked at it curiously, read it a few times—your lips moving absently as your eyes roved over the paper. A strange, frightening look passed over your face, quickly like the shadow of a bird flying by. It was so weird, I don't know how to describe it. It almost made you look like someone else. Just for

a moment. Then you were yourself again, with your indifferent, forgettable gaze.

Remembering that look now makes me shudder. I guess that must be one reason I gather up your notes now whenever I find them—to keep that shadow, whatever it is, whatever is causing it, away.

[XXXIV]

I didn't think to wonder before but now I wonder—*is it* something that we can keep away? or is it already in the house?

[XXXV]

I know there's probably no truth to it but sometimes it feels like you and I are just waiting for the other to fall asleep so we could have the house to ourself. In fact, I don't even know whether you really sleep or not—eventually, you always return to your room but the thin spaces around your door would remain constantly lit when you were inside. In fact, the only time the light went out was when you left the room—as soon as it went out from the spaces around the door I knew to leave the hallway so you would not find out I had been watching.

I know it isn't true that you're only waiting for me to fall asleep because most times you hardly seem to notice there's anyone else in the house at all. Whenever we do find ourselves confronted with the other, directly, face to face, so neither of us could possibly deny that the other was in the house with them, you would seem invariably surprised; I never know what to do with myself. You never act like you're better than me, never act openly superior or disdainful or whatever, in fact never ask anything of me. The few times I tried to cook for the both of us, you seemed to think I was making meals for myself, as though I were that big an eater, that the place I'd set

at the table was for myself and not for you. When I realized that was what you thought and set the table for two the resulting meal was so awkward for the both of us I decided I should never do it again and haven't done since.

[XXXVI]

It's embarrassing: you did the laundry today. You used the washing machine out back. I'd been eyeing it since I first had to wash my own clothes, but had been too unsure of my place in the household to use it myself. It didn't seem right to use it for my own clothes and I didn't know whether I should wash yours. I'd already been inside your room to clean, had even been bold enough to take that weird mess on the floor, which did not seem to belong in your room, that's why I took it to secret away in my own room, but it seemed to me that touching your dirty clothes, your soiled undergarments, might be going too far.

I knew how wasteful washing machines were, how much soap, electricity, and most of all precious water they consumed. I was judicious with my own washing, doing everything by hand, even measuring out the water by first collecting it in a pitcher, pouring the water into the batya as needed. I remember how unreliable the water supply had been where I grew up, how often the faucets would only gurgle phlegmatically, sputtering drily when turned on, how mama would send me and one of my siblings out with a few buckets, joining

the procession of other small children similarly equipped on pilgrimage to the artesian well one or two towns over—our town's own little Children's Crusade. On the way we would be joined by Eulysis and Rayuela, a couple of kids living down the street from us. Always together, we could never tell them apart, never understood how they related to each other; they called each other Noones and Nogame, nobody else did, were they surnames? jokes? codenames? were they neighbors? cousins? siblings? We couldn't even tell which house or houses they came from, one moment it would be just me, my sibling, and some other kids, and then it was everyone and them. However they were related, they always carried a single large bucket between them, almost too big for them to carry. I suppose that meant they lived in the same house, were somehow family, but while they had some similarities I remember thinking there were also some essential, unbridgeable differences that made it almost impossible to think of them as having come from the same bloodline, much less share a parent. Anyway, it was either Eulysis or Rayuela or Noones or Nogame from whom I'd first heard the phrase Children's Crusade.

It was particularly embarrassing since I had been sitting in the back doing nothing when you came down with your laundry. I had just finished cleaning and got up on my feet as soon as I saw you to say so, to explain my idleness, but you didn't even seem to notice I was there. You put the laundry basket down on the floor and started putting all the clothes armful by armful—how long had it been since you last did your laundry? There were so many clothes in the basket!—into the machine. I was surprised by the economy of your movements, your brisk efficiency that didn't seem to jibe with the dreaminess I'd come to know from you. In fact, it was terrifying. I found it, somehow, terrifying. At first I could not look away, but soon I could no longer contain the sense of horror growing inside me, this feeling that I was witnessing something not meant for my eyes, for anybody's eyes, something forbidden, immensely obscene. The final, most embarrassing thing about it all: I ran away.

[XXXVII]

Everything is provided for. Every week, the pantry and refrigerator are restocked. I've never had to go to the grocery store or market myself. Instead, for what I've come to understand is something of a weekly allowance, Aling B brings produce straight from the wet market, Berting brings groceries on the back of a motorcycle. I have no idea if they do the shopping or if a personal shopper does and they only deliver. They're friendly enough, but always in a hurry, don't seem to like to talk.

There's enough here for a whole family, not a very large one, but too much for just you and me.

Who made these arrangements? Why so much? You don't even eat that much. Aling B and Berting only shrug as I hand them their allowance. As regular as clockwork, but they always seem most of all just eager to leave.

Is it that they've seen what I've seen? More likely they've seen more, know something I don't. Which makes me wonder. Why am I still here? This house so clearly full of secrets not

for me to know. Why don't I just go? Can you tell me what's keeping me here?

[XXXVIII]

I know I shouldn't be writing you. I know that. It's impertinent, isn't it. So I have to be careful to keep my writing hidden, keep them to myself—unlike the notes you leave around the house. But who else would I write? Like I said before, I no longer have whatever life I used to have in that other world outside. What's left of my life then but this house? What do I have left—not even this house, to which I don't belong and which could never belong to me—what's left for me but only you?

[XXXIX]

You said I should keep the book—I'd only read one poem when you walked into the library. I tried to leave as quickly as I could, but you touched my arm so shyly, so gently, the tips of your fingers barely brushing against the skin of my arm before jumping modestly away again it froze me instantly to the spot. I should take it with me to my room, you said. Go on, please, you said. Take it. So kind, your eyes, I thought—had I never seen them before? Since then—I can't explain it—I've felt the obligation to read the book like a weight on my chest, bearing down on my heart suddenly welling up, too heavy with shame to continue. Instead I try to remember what I'd already read, repeating it to myself as best I can, in my own words, as though by doing so I'd prove myself—what? worthy of reading the rest? Why is it that the generosity of our betters fills us so with shame?

[XL]

scurrying across the black angle at noon ravens screaming hard your shadow brushing past the hind and sometimes you can see them resting grumpily oh how they disturb the brown silence in which a field is enraptured like a woman who moves with a hard idea and sometimes you can hear them screeching for carrion they sense somewhere and suddenly they head north for the flight and disappear like a funeral procession in air that trembles with lust

[XLI]

The house contains—four or five beds of various sizes, more or less corresponding with the number of bedrooms; at least two dining tables, one large enough to seat 16 people at once, but wrapped in the patina of never having been used—though often dusted, occasionally perhaps even polished—in over a decade; several shelves of books, full, often beyond capacity, not all housed within the rather crowded, airless, badly artificially lit library; a rather old-fashioned gas range oven, an empty LPG tank (most of the cooking done electric, the LPG supply subscription long forgotten, or never been at all), assorted kitchen- and tableware, frequently mismatched as though received as gifts instead of bought; many though probably not all the things you'd find in any house approximating the same land area and number of floors (indeterminate, many seeming at odds with the geometry of the two main staircases); shadows, dust, memory—

[XLII]

sitting in the dark corner at lunch break I was surprised by the rush of black birds racing by like noisy shadows outside the window where before they only perched quietly day in day out as though observing us intently waiting for something as we went about wandering aimlessly inside the house—they turned the peaceful garden into a riot witches making dark prophecies scolding us with high voices—circling as though around something dead they suddenly changed course fading into the horizon like a procession leaving me alone quivering against an unexpected desire

[XLIII]

—cupboards for linens and kitchen things; drawers full of beads, buttons, and a flake of obsidian that could be some mythical creature's tooth or scale; icons, crosses, plaster statues in ornate—some would say garish—royal garments uncharacteristic of the local culture, the various accoutrements of a religion nobody has practiced in the house for a long, long time, haunting the unlit hallways that exist in the house only to bring you from one room to another, a mirror on one end offering the seldom comforting suggestion of the presence another person in the house—

[XLIV]

hark! the ravenscurry angular noonshadow brushed be hinds & restitute grumping oh the brown now quietude athwart in rapturously moved witches begging for scraps the smell driving them nuts & off & away! northwinded with the black parade shaking shaking hungry shook!

[XLV]

—one room, painted for a little girl, filled over the years with an accumulation of mostly boyish things; cheap kits of tiny plastic soldiers dismembered by the tread of unshod feet, dolls, action figures and robot dinosaurs sat for tea in an oversized dollhouse; rocketships and jackstones; a disassembled astronomical telescope; old electronics from various decades, mostly from the last century; a collection of Choose Your Own Adventures, waterlogged, dog-eared, mildewed; a set of dice—

[XLVI]

I close my eyes, trying to remember the poem, trying to recreate it, the words. But memory fails—I can imagine the shape of it—what makes it poetry, I suppose, but what do I know—but the words have been replaced in my mind almost completely by images taken or only put together from the things I see every day, here—outside in the garden and inside your house—the ravens, a deer, a shadow passing over a field and some "brown silence"—whatever that is—disturbed by a lot of noise and commotion, some woman—in my head she looks like you—in thought—but what is she thinking?—maybe a witch, or a coven of witches, there's death, and a procession. I don't understand a word of it, how could I possibly remember the poem enough to write it down. I don't understand any of it, except for how, in the end, everything comes down to naked desire.

[XLVII]

—various types of broom, a feather duster, an old vacuum cleaner, dishrags, scouring pads and sponges, the various tools, all commercially available over the last few decades, intended to stave off dust and entropy, and their singular, philosophical descendant—or perhaps opposite: the machine, a thing of some weird, charcoal and wine-dark material, an uncomfortable combination of cheap bakelite and more modern, expensive-looking alloys, a dismantled 3D jigsaw puzzle body, possibly roughly capsule-shaped or coffin-sized but not both when assembled, surrounded by a wrap of octopodean connecting arms of accordioned vinyl hoses and aluminum tubing, designed by its creators to extract, recover, rescue living—literally living—memories from the human minds that entrap them.

[XLVIII]

Flight at black angles

At the procession, ravens

Bewitched and trembling

[XLIX / END]

To say they live together in the house might feel less a statement of fact than an exaggeration, though in other senses both might be equally true—they live together in the house the way some might say they live with their memories: the objectivity of such and such a statement is irrelevant; it can only be said and once said cannot then be unsaid.

They live together in the house.

[L / EPILOGUE]

Orpheus never descended into Hell, nor did he ever find poor, dead Eurydice there. Rather, Orpheus, drunkenly suckling upon his own melancholy—drawing, so he imagined, sustenance from it—entered into his own mind again and again, and there he thought he did find poor, dead Eurydice, animated the way only the mind of the living animates the body of the dead, and there she would dance before him as he often with eyes closed imagined she would in life, her hips swaying fingers delicately gesturing come hither—come, Orpheus, come to me, do you want this? I want you, Orpheus, come—but always tantalizingly just *there*; just out of reach. Turn around, Orpheus, lead the way, go on, show me the way out of here and I'll follow, I'll go with you, Orpheus, I'll follow, only promise you won't look back, promise you won't ever look back—and Orpheus promised.

Every single time Orpheus would look back; each time poor, dead Eurydice just stood there—fading, faded, away into the shadows of his mind. Orpheus, who held so desperately onto poor, dead Eurydice in his mind, was, even there, losing her. Every act of remembering, he realized, only reduced her fur-

ther, as the memory of her was replaced by the memory of the memory of her, and the memory of the memory of the memory again and again each time he entered into his own mind to find her. He resolved at last to do as he promised, never to look back, never to remember her again—it seemed the only way he could keep her.

Was the invention of the machine really necessary to solve the problem of Orpheus? Who would have thought anyone would ever really have recourse to use such a thing—that anyone would really turn such a thing on, expect it to work? It was a notion, that was all, wasn't it, a funny old notion. Funny how things work out—how a notion can end up on the floor, scattered about in pieces. Taken away, forgotten. Discarded. Barely an afterthought. Just so much junk nobody knows what to do with.

Did it even work?

The black birds gather outside the window, oblivious to the two figures wandering alone inside the house.

Aimee Celine Rivera knows when to go out, when to stay in, usually, but rarely gets things done; *"*munin," an unfinished text, is her first completed work.

Jayaprakash Satyamurthy is a writer and musician who lives in Bangalore, India. His previous publications include the novella STRENGTH OF WATER, a poetry collection called BROKEN CUP and COME TOMORROW, a short story collection. He plays bass for the band Djinn and Miskatonic and lives with many cats and dogs.

Last Words From Geoffroy Amar

Were you born broken?
Then we are siblings
And my hand is in yours
And my hopes are for you
Our footprints falter and weave
When we fall only we lift ourselves
But sometimes a distant breath
Or whisper might remind you
You can
That's me. And when I was lost
That was you. We find our own way
And we are not whole
But we are walking from day
To day alive and faltering and
Stumbling and limping and
Picking ourselves up again
You are a flame
You burn brighter than the day
Because what was broken
Ran so deep that your spirit
Is magma. That's all I wanted to say
This is the whisper on the wind
You may hear at times
Now lift yourself up. Again and ever.

13th April 2023, Bangalore

Al Kimiya

The world as I can see
Is a thing encrusted
Where shit crystallises
Under the right conditions
And the delicate yellow of a puddle
Is a beautiful colour no matter what
The world as I can see
Is nothing but a marvel
A corridor through a treasure house
Of proscripted beauty
- The best kind
The world as I can see
Defeats all your attempts
And feints and sleights
To show up anything real
As ugly.

6th April 2023, Bangalore

Vision blinds the view
Disclosed, disposed
Feathered and excoriated

Denuded and beautiful
Fireworks in our eyes
Mercury for hands
Considered sane or touched
Nothing divine
Nothing winged stays
Fish eyes cloud borne
Watch megiddo
Watch kalki gallop
Black wheel turn

9th April 2023, Bangalore

Chapters 3 and 19

Was a time you could not
Consider yourself sane or touched
If you never saw mystery lights
Mystery lights in the sky
And I did too briefly
Once
Was sane or touched then
Was a child
Feathered and alien

That was a previous century
We've autopsied ET
Disclosed aerial phenomena
Now angels are back
After all
Gods were always alien
Nothing human is divine
Nothing of earth is alien
Nor need it be

Was a time vision was in contempt
Blinded by a nuclear fable
We ate radar breakfasts
Radio world was explained
I was thought sane or touched
I was a child
Gods waited outside the window
With mocking fish eyes
And spring heels

That was a century
This is the millennium
Mystery lights
Mystery wings
Vision racks the era

Green Close

Blanketed by cloud
Cornered in a green close
Flower scent in my nose
City like a shroud
Because I can afford
The death dues of a day
Wasted in shades of grey
Far within, solitary in the hoard

There are mazes in legends
There are twists within turns
What one deserves, another earns
I can afford such priceless friends
Because I am the end of a tether
Gathered in a green pause
Garnered in a grey cause
Leaves, sky, I; together.

23rd June 2022, Bangalore

Beasts Beasts Beasts

We are allegorical beasts
Heraldic beasts
Written about in world books
To instruct each child
In orthodox meaning

No summer but touches us
No monsoon ought swelter
The timbers we shelter under
We have faces of torsos
Our feet face the temple

On a stage you order us
A darkened risen place
Where two or three lights
Remind the world
Everything is dark

Beasts of an arena are we
Herded and cornered
Martyrs will murmur to us
As we fend a last revel
Before myrmidon cuts us down

11th April 2023, Bangalore

Comparative Theology

They are not worshipful of my gods
Nor I of theirs
In this I see their wisdom
My nescience
But that my gods are real
And theirs is a guess
A hypothesis a mistake
And mine
Mine are always with me
Blood of my bone marrow of
My sorrow
O let none worship my gods hence
As I shall not worship yours
And none the wiser shall I be
May your god elevate you
Apotheosis be upon you
May mine curse me and smite me
Cast me down in punishment
For my vile acts of worship.

11th April 2023, Bangalore

Some Thoughts And A Declaration

I definitely had some thoughts about the sea
Most of them a kind of rhythmic celebration
Of the undeniable fact of its immensity
The solidity of it the swell of it the concentration
Dashing against shores since shores emerged
Breeding and harboured and spewing us all
The steel of it the splash and foam an edge that surges
That searches its way from sandy strand to upland hall

I definitely had some thoughts, I was aloft, I was afire
Dipping my toes in the skein I felt a charge
And soaring I pondered on those swirling gyres
How plastic, how persistent, how monstrous large
At this point the sea sat down at my own size
Cradled me in my own moment of drowning
I am blind it said, we, blind in our all-seeing tide eyes
I am a roar it said I am a burning a rout a ceremonial of crowning.

9th April 2023, Bangalore

Chapter 17 (partial)

I have eyes within eyes of which you do not know
For these my eye sockets are merely roosts
From which furl owls in pairs when darkness is full, thus
I give eyes to the night of which you can not see

I give forth liquid song from these burning lips
Drop by drop, poisons with great virtues, as
My hymnal unfastens beasts and breaks prisons
The venom I birth is prized by midwives and apothecaries

When my eyes sing back to me on night's feathers
When my songs drip back into me from stalactites
Depending from the roof my burial cavern
You may consume my ashes as an antidote to all the world.

10th April 2023, Bangalore

Gold By The Sea

The sun at that angle
Where it touches the sea
Into a haze of gold

The spray hits my shanks
As I stride the strand
Sand seeds gold, gold in gold

Setting, the sun inflames
All of sand and wave
Everything pauses, poised

Knowing nothing here stays
It, and I, strive to be
Singular, fused in memory

Fishing boats reappear
From further waves furled
Time returns with them

Daily, mundane, staple
Eternal, never the same
I walk home, head haloed gold.

9th March 2020, Goa

Schemed by any but me
It is better to be suspended
In airy nothingness
Or dark emptiness
It is better to be defended
Only by obscurity

And to say in parting, here was my monument:
More than a portico, less than a pediment.

20th March 2023, Chorao

No Demon In View But Time

It frightens me a bit now
To vie for a place
In the limited seating
Available in a table of contents
I, you see, have no intents,
No purposes, no maggots eating
The inside of my face
And telling me the why and how

This is a boast I realise
But one I make good on
With each missed call
Each failure to launch
In this deviation I stay staunch
A separate slope for my own fall
A unique abyss in which to be gone
Far from collective enterprise

Poe said it with more music
But in his cloud was a trace
Of the long romantic dawn
Of his continental forebears
I come after a century of scares
To a world more forlorn
No maggot chews within my face
Except one raised on my own physic

No demon in view but time
But I digress and digress
And see no need to apologise
I was talking about my fears
The horror of finding peers
Of being cut down to size
And classified more or less
Of being forced into a rhyme

Identikit

I'm a treasure map
I'm yellowed and
worn at the edges
There are blood stains
and rips on me
I'm drawn with an archaic
feather quill
By someone not used
to writing or drawing
I'm crude but I work
And until you follow
the route to the end
You won't know if I'm
true
And even if, I'm not
the treasure.

28th March 2023, Bangalore

To Anesidora

We must unsee the invisible
The silhouette in the rain
The hole in the night sky
The lady between the trees
The divinity of sunshine
The shadow with fingers of ice
We must understand not to see
We must learn not to conceive
The world is occult enough without us
Without our filthy fecund eyes
Without our schematic brains
Gestalting ghosts from machines
Without our machinery of possession
Inferning every rock with a spirit
And every soul with a shadow
And every shadow with a will
And every will with a way oh we
Must unsee the invisible
The world is enough without

-You should have known when to close the box-

12th April 2023, Bangalore

Upon Him

My feet are not teeth
But what if my ears were

To chew on every sound
Masticate the thirds and runes

&That my eyes were tongues
Sardonic with exegesis

O confuse this head of mine
Hymn upon hymn I'll bear thee

O harvest these fears of mine
Gold without worth unto thee

[redacted
]

Gold without worth
Holy of holies.

7th April 2023, Bangalore

There Are Four Pillars

Four words in a row
Can be too little
Or much too much
It all depends whether

It all depends whether
You have the time
You have the need
I have the words

I have the words
They are hard, opaque
I use them like gauze
Worn as a veil

Four words in a row
It all depends whether
I have the words
You have the stone.

6th April 2023, Bangalore

I fe(e)l(l) down

I want to be in the world of rarest
Most coveted colours and elegant subtle
Melodies the impossible refinement of a Chopin
Waltz. The world
Of sublime superlatives or else
The world of darkest of most uncanny
Of a supreme sunlost squalour
Even light can only multiply into
Shades of blinding dark
Like a Galas aria played at the
Burial of a wretch

But instead I'm here

Feeling down in a world
Sort of middling on average
Megiddo still a few centuries away
And even though Kalki already paces
Through the same streets that I find
Are a synecdoche for the nowhere of it all even though
He slouches to some destiny, I
I'm trapped alive in the long afternoon
Before its gloaming, looming hour
After the end of the beginning
Here at the beginning of the end, I

Quintessence of dust.

5th April 2023, Bangalore

Here At The Beginning Of The End I Geoffroy Amar

More Than Birds

The sky flew away
Without a word
So did I

The sky seen through
Was the forest
The bird was too

The earth held ground
I a fell swoop
The end of winter

I fell away
Into the sky
And so did all my words

Wings carry more than birds
Seasons turn more than leaves.

March 1st 2023, Bangalore

The Path I Told You

The way ahead is as tunnel
Through to what dark or light
The way is brown and green
The way is tarmac and glare
The way is slush and star
The way is a barrel
To a beautiful bullet carved
Your beautiful name on it

The way ahead will take you
Until it stops you drops you
Deposits you in what
The way ahead was not
Designed or directed by you
You must somehow believe
It points nowhere yet
Or exactly where you mean

Run to the sea if you can
Run into the highest of tides
Run to the sun if you want
Run like a moth flies
Run all night if you like
Run from the heights ever
Run with the wind
If you must, then fall.

26th March 2023, Bangalore

Time Is To Tide

Sitting with the incarnate figures
Before faith was a requisite
Planning our journeys together
Before maps ever were drawn

A familiar creature draws near
A thing four-legged at times
The room appears to disappear
The walls stand firm as the earth

In the regard of the moated sun
The daylight doffs its rays
We within are illumined one by one
Presently the messengers will call

Here is the word of our council
Here below seal and sigil:
The world works by no will
Time is to tide and high is as low.

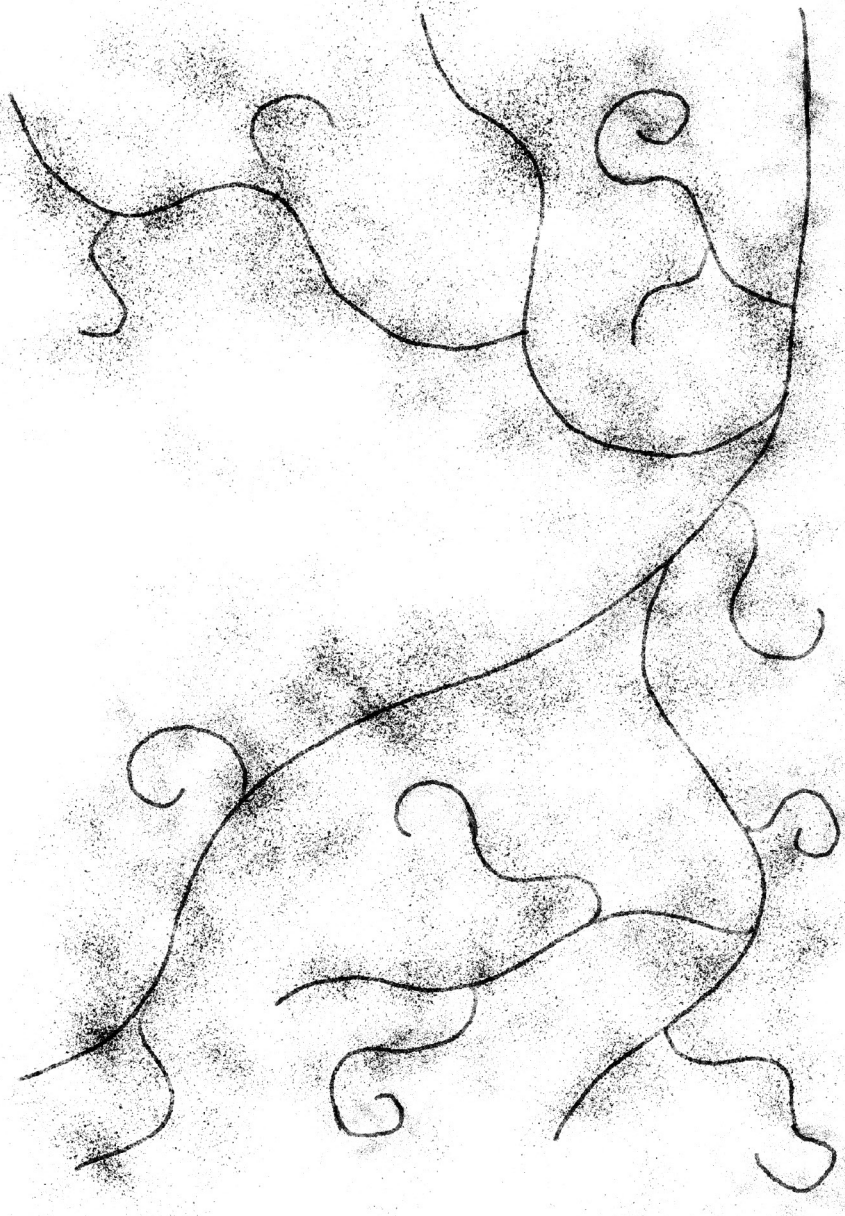
Chorao, March 20 2023

Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that does fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
Ding-dong,
Hark! Now I hear them – Ding-dong, bell

William Shakespeare, The Tempest, Act 1, Scene 2

The Poet is like that wild inheritor of the cloud,
A rider of storms, above the range of arrows and slings;
Exiled on earth, at bay amid the jeering crowd,
He cannot walk for his unmanageable wings.

Charles Baudelaire, The Albatross, tr George Dillon



sea change